



## **Proverbs 30:7-9**

### **Wealth**

**8/6/2023**

We are going back to the book of Proverbs today. We'll start with Proverbs 30:7-9 but bring in a number of Proverbs as we look at what this book says about our possessions and our wealth:

**Proverbs 30:7-9 7 Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: 8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, 9 lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.**

In praying here for neither poverty nor riches, Agur (the author of this Proverb), exposes a biblical view of wealth, that flows from a unique view of the material world.

Christianity is not just the way that we satisfy our desire to have some spirituality in our lives. It certainly explains our hunger for what is spiritual, it makes sense of our feeling that there is more to life than just what we can see. So it does give us the spirituality our hearts are looking for.

But it's way more comprehensive than that. It's not just the thing we do to scratch the spiritual itch to become well-rounded people. Christianity provides for us the way that we look at everything.

Our Christianity is not just one book in the library of our lives, it is the entire library, and all of the other books find their place within the framework that our belief about ultimate things provides.

And our whole way of looking at the material world, at stuff around us, is radically shaped by Christian teaching.

There are two main non-Christian ways of looking at the material world.

**One is that the things around us are our god.** Pantheism says everything is god. And this is the view of many, especially ancient, world religions that worship the creation. And more modern people wouldn't worship the creation in a religious sense, but they would ascribe to creation some of the attributes that we would only ascribe to God. They would say it is eternal (has always been around in one form or another), they treat creation like the uncreated one, it created itself like the self-sufficient one. In that way of thinking, the material world is ultimate, the material world is god.

**The other non-Christian way of looking at “stuff” is believing that the material world is bad.** This also had ancient manifestations - the old gnostic heresy said that if God created the world he did so through a series of lesser deities or demi-urges to absolve himself of the responsibility of making something as bad as the material world. The world is bad and a good god couldn't have made it, they thought. And our hope then is to be liberated from the material world one day, our ultimate existence is not the one we have in these material bodies, but in our spirits that will one day shed these bodies. Christians can sometimes believe this - that the body is bad, or separate completely from who we really are. I can be one thing in my spirit and another in my body - who I truly am is disconnected from the material reality.

And we can apply these sub-Christian ways of viewing the material world to the little piece of the material world that we possess - our wealth. We commit the same errors, believing our wealth is ultimate or believing it is bad and inherently sinful.

**We will believe wealth is ultimate with the prosperity Gospel.** It says that if we do Christianity right, we will be rewarded with wealth. Wealth is the prize for following Jesus. Which is a subtle way of treating wealth as ultimate - if I please Jesus, He will give me something that's even better than Jesus, namely, material wealth. Wealth, in this view, is the most important thing. We use God to get it.

**Or we can adopt a poverty gospel** that says the material world is all bad, so don't work with it at all, be free from it all. Practice asceticism and minimalist living in every regard. And don't enjoy the stuff - enjoying stuff and keeping any stuff is bad. Don't enjoy physical pleasures (like a good meal or a beautiful garden or a nice vacation) because those aren't spiritual pleasures. And only spiritual pleasures are truly holy.

But both of these views are false, and both lead to major dysfunction when it comes to how we think about and handle wealth.

**Both also undermine generosity:** If wealth is ultimate, don't give it away. Hoard it. And if wealth is bad, don't share it with people you love! We just spent two years trying not to share a bad virus - if something is bad, we do all kinds of crazy things to prevent giving it to others. We don't give bad things away to be a blessing to others - that would only be a curse to them. So don't give if its ultimate, and don't give if its bad.

But the Biblical view of the world and our little slice of it starts by calling it good.

In the beginning of the Bible, God is creating stuff and calling it good and even very good.

But also from the beginning of the Bible there's a clear distinction between creation and creator. Stuff isn't God. God made stuff and called it good. Stuff didn't make stuff, God

didn't make God - God made stuff - so God is separate from the stuff.

**And likewise the scriptures call our little piece of the material world, our wealth, good.**

But we can make idols out of good things and misuse good things and worship good things, so the scriptures are careful to put wealth in its place and keep us from making an ultimate out of it, a god out of it. Jesus said you can't serve God and money, so we do have to choose which will be ultimate to us. And we do tend to treat our money like god more than maybe anything else in our lives. We ascribe the attributes of deity to our money regularly.

So in Proverbs 30 Agur prays for **neither poverty nor riches**. He prays against too little - if his needs aren't met he might be tempted to steal and dishonor God. And He prays against receiving so much that his riches become ultimate and he forgets the Lord. He prays for good things, material things in his life, and he prays that he would never have so much that he is tempted to not rely on God.

He viewed wealth as both a good gift from God and dangerous, not because it is bad, but because our hearts are bad and can do the wrong things with it.

So today we'll try to draw together as much of the teaching of Proverbs on our wealth as we can in a short period of time - but we will see the goodness of wealth, the danger of wealth, and the right use of wealth as people who want to live in the fear of the Lord.

We'll start with:

### **The Goodness of Wealth**

**Proverbs 10:22 [22] The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.**

We don't want to be so anti-prosperity that we can't make sense of passages like this. This doesn't say God makes all blessed people rich or that riches are the norm. But God does, at times, give people more than enough financially.

And when God is doing that, there's no sorrow added with it. There's no guilt from having oppressed people to get it. There's no sorrow because you chose that over the Lord or over your family. Sometimes God blesses with possessions, sometimes even a great deal of them. And sometimes, though not always, wise living leads to having more:

**Proverbs 12:27 - Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.**

**Proverbs 24:3-4 - By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; 4**

**by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.<sup>1</sup>**

**Proverbs 13:23 The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.**

And that could also be translated, “It is swept away through lack of judgment.” And both are true:

Injustice prevents the poor from making money (they could have oppressive bosses that don’t care for their workers, they could lack access to the legal system so there’s no recourse when they’re mistreated, they could be working under oppressive government and taxation.) In many of the poorest parts of the world, you can find a criminal government that is oppressing and keeping even hard-workers very poor.

And lack of knowledge and judgment also prevents us from pulling out of the earth all that could be pulled out of it for the flourishing of humanity. The more knowledge we gain, the more good we can make. This week there was hopeful news about a possible breakthrough in the area of superconductors and a possible pill for many forms of cancer. Through more knowledge and study of the world God made, more is yielded from the ground.

And as we get better at farming and agriculture, that allows the ground to produce a lot more.

The scriptures are very in favor of working hard and gaining knowledge and wisdom by studying the world God made, and when we apply those things to the material world, more good material stuff is produced.

So we have to have a category for righteous people who love the Lord and also produce and possess wealth.

So we shouldn’t be automatically suspicious of the rich. We shouldn’t assume they all got there by doing something wrong. Some did, but some worked hard, stumbled into opportunities that God put in front of them, and by doing a lot of good for a lot of people they profited financially, and no sorrow needs to be added to that.

But Proverbs is wise - it doesn’t paint everybody with the same color. There are plenty of wealthy people that are evil and got their wealth by being evil:

**Proverbs 22:16 Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.**

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<sup>1</sup> Also Proverbs 13:4 “The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.”

These people mistreat the poor, they bribe the rich, and that's how they got it. There are wicked rich people. The scriptures don't say good people alone become wealthy. Righteous people and wicked people can produce wealth.

So we should avoid blanket judgments that the Bible doesn't make.

God is a generous God, and it shouldn't surprise us to see God being generous to people. And we are called not to resent or envy that, but to rejoice with the blessing another is receiving.

So wealth is good, and desiring at least enough of it to meet needs is good, and to receive it as a blessing from God is also good.

### **Dangers of Wealth:**

But there are dangers with wealth. Proverbs says even more about that. And be careful here not to assume this doesn't apply to you because you didn't drive a lambo in to church this morning. Almost everyone here is in the richest 1% of the world, so this isn't just for other people.

And as we said earlier, the great danger of wealth for all of us, regardless of how much of it we have, is that it becomes our god.

### **Treating it as the most important thing:**

**Proverbs 8:10-11 "Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, 11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.**

The silver and gold is just not the most important thing. Wisdom is so much better.

**Proverbs 15:16-17 16 Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil. 17 Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.**

There's a lot that's more important than wealth. The fear of the Lord. Love and family and friendships. Wisdom and instruction - God's word.

And the danger is that we take the biblical teaching that stuff is good and to be desired and that hard work is a good way to produce it, and we get up and hustle, but with no fear of the Lord. We sacrifice the things that are more important than money - like our walk with the Lord and our families, in pursuit of money.

We'll never handle money the right way if we always make it the highest priority.

Another danger with wealth, and another way we put it in the place of God, is when we begin

### **Thinking it gives us security:**

**Proverbs 18:11 - A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination.**

We can think, "I have enough, so every need I have is met." We treat our savings like a wall around us that can protect us. We can sleep at night if there's not enough in the emergency fund, and we're panicked when it's at zero. We can feel very exposed, like who we are is teetering and we could lose ourselves. But wealth was never meant to secure us:

**Proverbs 11:28 - Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.**

Our stuff is good, but not to be trusted. Money should be just money to us, not our driving factor, not the thing that's first on our mind all day, not the thing that gives us our hope. That's a sure way to fall.

We also put money in the wrong place in our lives by

### **Giving Us a False Sense of Community**

**Proverbs 19:4 - Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.**

Wealth attracts friends. There weren't quotation marks in the original Hebrew, but it seems the intent is to say "Wealth brings many new *"friends"* in scare quotes. There's a lot of fake unity built around status and possessions and the kind of neighborhood you live in.

And those who are poor lose everyone who only cares about what they can give back.

We can think of ourselves as wealthy or middle class, we can think, "these are my people," allowing that to be our identity. And then, prioritizing money, we desert those who don't share our identity. We desert the poor.

Many of us have moved up in income the last decade. And that has brought moves to new neighborhoods, bigger houses to accommodate growing families, better vehicles - and we can praise God for those good things. But it's worth asking ourselves whether we

still have friends or spend time with people who don't have the same economic status or education status or same degree of success we've had.

A poor man is deserted by "his friend," and we don't want to be the "friends" in scare quotes, we want to be friends, and have friendships that were not formed by status and stuff but by love and service.

So we run the risk of treating wealth as the most important thing, of allowing it to give us a false sense of security or false community. And Proverbs also warns against the very real temptation of:

### **Acquiring It at All Costs:**

**Proverbs 16:8 "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice."**

We are tempted to acquire wealth in dishonest ways. To take shortcuts. To take from others so we can gain for ourselves.

There's a difference between good and righteous work and dishonest work. Good business is where both parties gain something they want. You make a great sandwich, I have ten dollars. I want the sandwich more than ten dollars, you want the ten dollars more than the sandwich. So you sell me the sandwich, and we both walk away having gotten something good we wanted. That's good, honest, just work and business.

But if you cheat me by skimping on the ingredients, if I cheat you by lying about the quality and asking for a refund - someone leaves saying, "I am so shrewd, I got something for nothing" and someone leaves with less. That's bad.

And you can take that principle and apply it in every industry, all the way up the economy - Christians should not gain with injustice. We should settle for less for ourselves rather than cheating someone, defrauding someone.

Sometimes if getting stuff is the priority, we will be tempted toward excess and foolish debt:

**Proverbs 22:7 "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender."**

This doesn't prohibit us from going into debt. It just tells us that debt is a form of long-term obligation and slavery. So we should be careful about why and when and for what we go into debt - because we don't want to attain something in a way that leaves us worse off.

We can also be tempted to overwork to acquire wealth:

**Proverbs 23:4 Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.**

We should be able to work hard, and then stop - not work all the time. 6 days of work, one day of rest. If we can't stop - if we can't rest and pull back, we may have fallen into the trap of believing some of the wrong things about wealth.

### **Grasping it too tightly**

**Proverbs 28:22 - A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him.**

Gain can be good, but not if we have to be stingy people to get there. Stingy people think, "I'll get there quicker if I'm cheap," but God's design is that when we get things, we grasp them loosely. We shouldn't be known as cheapskates.

A few weeks ago, there was an obituary in a paper in Batavia for a man named Jim that died. And the author of the article had a lot of good things to say about him - he was very good to the community in a number of ways. But notoriously cheap. He called him the cheapest man in Batavia. The obituary reads:

*"There was the time Jim, a confirmed bachelor then in middle age, had a date. He took her to a chain restaurant. Jim let her know that they were going Dutch. Fine, she said. At meal's end the waitress came with the bill. Jim's date threw in half the total; Jim pulled out a "Buy One, Get One Free" coupon. There was no second date."<sup>2</sup>*

Let's be wise with our use of wealth, but not cheap.

### **The Right Use of Wealth:**

First, a pattern throughout scripture is that God calls on his people who receive good things from His hand to honor him with the first portion of it through worshipful giving:

### **Honor the Lord**

**Proverbs 3:9-10**

**[9] Honor the LORD with your wealth  
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;  
[10] then your barns will be filled with plenty,  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/relationships/a-savers-grace>



In the Old Testament they honored with giving and sacrifice at the temple, in the New Testament they gave generously and cheerfully to one another, to the poor, and to the church centrally. As a way of saying, "All I have is the Lord's." Giving to God's kingdom, and sacrificially giving as worship has always been a part of the life of God's people.

And there's also always been a special place in God's economy for our giving to those with less:

### **Give to Those in Need**

**Proverbs 22:9** *Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.*

**Proverbs 19:17** *"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed."*

**Proverbs 14:31** - *Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.*

An important way we honor the one who made the poor is to give to those with real need. Proverbs does teach that there are some poor people who got there by laziness, but it doesn't paint them all with the same brush. And it would be easy to assume "that's all of them" and then never give to anyone in need and feel justified.

But God has a special place in his heart for caring for the poor, and even promises to (somehow, often not monetarily) repay those who give to the poor to honor their maker.

### **Cultivate Contentment & Gratitude**

**Proverbs 15:16** *16 Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.*

We are called to receive all that God gives us, whether its a lot or a little, with a whole lot of thanksgiving. If we have the Lord and we have little besides, we are thankful. If we see others with more, we are thankful on their behalf. It's hard to envy when you're truly thankful, it's hard to be greedy when you're thankful. It's hard to have a wrong view of wealth when you're thankful - you can't think it's god and ultimate because you're thanking the creator for it, and you can't think its bad because you're saying thanks for it.

### **Save Enough**

**Proverbs 21:20** *"Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling,*

**but a foolish man devours it.**

God wants us to enjoy the gifts he has given us, but doesn't want us consuming them all at once. So wise saving and planning is good and God-honoring.

But mainly we are to see our wealth as something to be distributed:

**Distribute It:**

**Proverbs 11:24–26**

- [24] One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;  
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.**
- [25] Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,  
and one who waters will himself be watered.**
- [26] The people curse him who holds back grain,  
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.**

Save for the things you know are coming. Build a cushion for emergencies. But give yourself to sowing what you have - to doing good with it. If you have a harvest of grain, you plant a lot of that grain to do more good. And if you are blessed it is to bless others, to invest in more fruitful ventures, to build, to give.

This temptation to hold back grain would have been strongest in a famine. The farmer brings in his harvest, people want to buy it, but he wants to save it because the famine is bad and who knows what next year holds. He says, in cases like that, give generously, don't hold back the grain. You have to trust God for the future.

See all that you have as a resource given to you by God to do good with. That good includes enjoying some and saving and planning and building for your family's future - it isn't all just giving to the church:

**Proverbs 13:22 - A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.**

But if money isn't God, we can grip it loosely and give it readily.

And we always have to recognize its limits - it can't do for us the ultimate thing. It can't save us:

**Recognize Its Dangers and Limits:**

**Proverbs 22:2 - The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all.**

**Proverbs 11:4 - Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.**

Wealth can't do the most important thing for us.

False gods get their power over us from promising to save us.

If we make getting a spouse a false god, an obsession, it's because we might believe that another person will complete me, make me whole, eliminate my sins, give me a future and happiness.

If we make getting fame or popularity our false God, it's because we think that can save: it can secure us, provide community for us, make us OK.

If we mak

Gods get their power over us from their promise to save.

Spouse

Fame

Money

Proverbs knocks the power out from under the money god - it can't save.

**Recognize That Only Jesus Can Do For Us What We Expect Money to Do:**

It's a safe bet that most of what you hope money to do for you can actually only be done for you by Jesus:

Guarantee a future.

Make you acceptable.

Secure you.

Give you a status that matters.

Rescue you from death

Give you true friends

All you hope for in wealth is yours in Christ

Enduring wealth

Solid joys

Lasting treasures

Jesus scattered it all

**2 Corinthians 8:7-9** “But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also. **8** I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.**9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Father, we confess that we have sinned against you in this regard - in our thoughts, believing we need more stuff to find joy, in our words of envy and bitterness over our lot, and in our deeds, which often demonstrate a worship of wealth and a greed for material things. We have left undone much of what you've called us to do with our wealth. We haven't loved you with it, and we haven't loved our neighbors as ourselves.

So Father, forgive us for what we have been.

Jesus, we thank you for your great generosity toward us. Though you were rich in glory, you laid that glory aside and gave absolutely all you had to rescue us from our spiritual poverty.

So Spirit, help us to believe this, and allow it to direct what we should be. Make us people who delight in you and doing your will, who walk in the ways of Jesus and live generous and contented lives, and worship and serve you only. Thank you for the good gifts you've given us, and keep us from thinking they are worthy of the glory and praise and focus that only you deserve.

### **Assurance:**

**John 3:17** “**17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him**